

STUDYING IN THE UNITED STATES

INTRODUCTION

Applying to colleges in the United States from abroad can be exciting and challenging. At times, it can also be frustrating or disappointing, but it need not be too difficult if you get accurate information and follow the required procedures carefully.

There are about 600,000 students from foreign countries enrolled at more than 3,600 colleges and universities in the United States. Many of these institutions receive applications from students worldwide, and do provide some assistance in the form of scholarships and financial aid. However, since such assistance is limited, college admission can be very competitive, especially for applicants from outside of the United States.

The key to successful admission to college lies in careful planning and timely completion of the required procedures. There are college handbooks, CD-ROMs and on-line sources which provide the necessary information on application procedures, admission policies, size, location, costs, degrees offered, majors, student profiles, activities, athletics, geographic facts, e.g. climate, and special programs and services for accredited colleges and universities in the United States.

It is important for you to obtain as much information as possible on the college(s) of your choice in order to make the right decision. Advice from knowledgeable and experienced educational advisers at the United States Embassy can help you make realistic plans and complete the admission process successfully.

Another valuable source of information is current or past students of institutions in the United States. Talk to them if you have the opportunity. Bear in mind though that their experiences will be influenced by the location and type of institution they attend or attended, which may be very different from the kind you plan to attend; however, they should be able to give you some ideas about adjusting to college life in the United States.

GENERAL OVERVIEW

If you are considering study in the United States you need accurate and up-to-date information and advice. Educational advising handouts have been developed to do exactly that - provide you with information, advice and strategies that can help you in the **organization** and **planning** that is so necessary for a satisfactory and successful academic career.

The first thing you need to know is the diversity of the number and quality of programs available to you. There is no Ministry of Education or equivalent federal body in the United States that controls curriculum or admission requirements; each institution is unique.

Secondly, every year hundreds of thousands of foreign students compete with each other for placement and financial aid at the more than 3,000 various community, junior and technical colleges, four-year colleges and universities.

Before you start your research, consider the following points:

- Get your parents, guardian or other family members involved in the whole process of research, selection, application, etc.
- What do you want to study? (e.g. biology, engineering, interior decoration).
- Can you receive the same education at less expense in your own or a nearby country?
- Will your U.S. degree/certificate be accepted when you return?
- Will it offer the right qualifications for the work you want to do?
- Determine the financial resources available to you.

It takes time and initiative to properly **research** and **select** the U.S. colleges (usually 5 to 10) to which you may wish to apply.

The following are a few definitions of terms used in American higher education that will help you to understand materials written in “American” English:

A **university** is an educational institution which maintains one or more undergraduate colleges, a graduate school or arts and sciences awarding master’s and doctoral degrees, and graduate professional schools.

A **college** is an institution of higher learning which offers only undergraduate programs, usually of four-year duration, leading to the bachelor’s degree.

The term **college** is also used in the general sense to refer to any post-secondary institution of higher learning.

The term **undergraduate studies** refers to two- or four-year programs in a college or university, after secondary school, leading to the associate or bachelor’s degree.

The term **graduate or post-graduate studies** refers to a course of study for students who already hold a bachelor’s degree, leading to a master’s degree. The doctoral degree requires further study and professional degrees are also graduate degrees.

The first year of an undergraduate program is called the **freshman** year, the second year is the **sophomore** year, the third year is the **junior** year, and the fourth year is the **senior** year.

Your **major** is your area of in-depth study and a **minor**, which is an area of secondary study, may also be pursued.

DO I NEED A COLLEGE OR UNIVERSITY DEGREE?

The answer is yes! Going to college enables you to gain valuable information and skills that you will use for the rest of your life, no matter what career you choose. College enables you to:

- Expand your knowledge and skills
- Express your thoughts clearly in speech and in writing
- Grasp abstract concepts and theories
- Increase your understanding of the world and your community

What this means for you:

College also has some other very practical advantages:

Job Opportunities. In today's fast-paced society, a rapidly increasing number of jobs require an education beyond secondary school. College graduates have more jobs from which to choose, when compared to those who do not pursue an education beyond the secondary level.

Earning More Money. A person who goes to college usually earns more than a person who doesn't. On an average, someone with a bachelor's degree earns almost double the salary of someone who has completed only secondary school.

Common College Excuses. Many students are still uncertain about going to college. Here are the five most common excuses, and why they may not necessarily be valid.

1. *I can't afford it.* Many students receive financial aid to help pay for college, and most aid is based on need. This means that the less money you have, the more aid you may receive.
2. *Nobody in my family has ever gone to college.* Being first can be hard. For instance, you may have to explain to your family why college is important to you. On the other hand, being first is likely to be a source of pride, for both you and for your family.
3. *I don't know what I want to do with my life.* Join the crowd. Thousand of college freshmen haven't yet decided on a major or a career. College gives you the opportunity to learn more about what's out there. You'll be exposed to a variety of academic subjects, people, and new perspectives.
4. *College is too hard for me.* Many students think college will be too hard for them. Keep in mind that all colleges offer tutoring and student support.
5. *I just won't fit in.* Most colleges have students from many backgrounds. To get an idea of what to expect, do your research, or better yet, visit in person, if possible. Be sure to check out the composition of the student body and to find out if they have clubs and activities that you'll be interested in joining.

Remember. You don't have to attend a four-year college. If you're unsure about which college you wish to attend, or even whether or not you want to attend a college at all, consider a community college. Community colleges are public two-year schools that provide an excellent education, whether you're considering an associate's degree, a certificate program, technical training, or plan to continue your studies at a four-year college.